DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 289 296 EC 201 257

AUTHOR Miller, Ronald C.; And Others
TITLE Less Restrictive Placement Personnel Training 1984-1986. Final Report. OEA Evaluation Report.
INSTITUTION New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn. Office of Educational Assessment.
PUB DATE Jul 87
NOTE 29p.; Prepared by the Special Education Evaluation Unit.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; Knowledge Level; *Mainstreaming; *Program Evaluation; Special Education; *Staff Development; *Student Placement; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Regular and Special Education Cooperation

ABSTRACT

The report presents findings of the second and third year of a study of the Less Restrictive Placement Personnel Training (LRP) program, designed to develop materials and training to increase the number of students mainstreamed into general education. In the final 2 years of the 3-year program, LRP expanded to include all special education regions with the total number of sites increasing from 16 to 50. Training modules and materials were also further refined. Study procedures involved interviews of on-site trainers and principals and observations of workshops. Pre- and post-test questionnaires were analyzed to assess participants' knowledge and attitudes. Evaluators noted a favorable reaction on the participants' part to the training as well as enhanced communication between the general and special education staffs. There was no notable change in participants' knowledge and attitudes toward less restrictive placement after the training. Recommendations are made for future projects of a similar nature. (CL)

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LESS RESTRICTIVE PLACEMENT PERSONNEL TRAINING 1984-1986 FINAL REPORT

OEA Evaluation Report

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Evaluation Section Report
Robert Tobias, Administrator
Judith Stern Torres, Senior Manager

July, 1987

LESS RESTRICTIVE PLACEMENT PERSONNEL TRAINING 1984-1986 FINAL REPORT

Prepared by the:
Special Education
Evaluation Unit

Ronald C. Miller,
Evaluation Manager

Marcia Torres and
Arnold Simmel,
Evaluation Specialists

Barbara Gottlieb, Helen Myers,
and Joan Chen,
Evaluation Consultants

EC 201 257

New York City Public Schools
Office of Educational Assessment
Richard Guttenberg, Director

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LESS RESTRICTIVE PLACEMENT PERSONNEL TRAINING
1984-1986
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Less Restrictive Placement Personnel Training (L.R.P.) was a three-year program designed by Division of Special Education (D.S.E.) staff to develop materials and training modules for general and special education staff and support personnel in order to increase the number of special education students mainstreamed into general education classes. The three-year program completed its final year of operation in June 1986. This report covers the years 1984-85 and 1985-86.

During its first year (1983-84) L.R.P. piloted training materials and training modules, and concentrated its activities in the Queens and Brooklyn East regions. During 1984-85, the L.R.P. activities expanded to include all special education regions; total L.R.P. sites were extended from 16 to 50; training materials and training modules were further refined. In 1985-86, 81 sites participated.

The Office of Educational Assessment (O.E.A.) interviewed on-site trainers and school principals, and conducted observations of training workshops. O.E.A. collected pre- and posttest questionnaires to assess participants' knowledge and attitudes.

On-site trainers in both years reported that participants reacted favorably to the training. In addition to increasing their knowledge and understanding about less restrictive placement, on-site trainers reported that communication between the general and special education staffs had improved. The ongoing involvement and commitment of principals, and their support of mainstreaming enhanced the participants' response to the program, on-site trainers reported. On-site trainers stated they needed more time in their own training and the workshop sessions for questions and discussion.

There was no notable change in participants' knowledge and attitude toward less restrictive placement after the training. In 1985-86, the lower pre-test and posttest outcomes suggested that an effort was made in the last year of the program, to recruit teachers who were less knowledgeable about less restrictive placement and could benefit the most from the training.

Project L.R.P. ended in 1985-86. If a similar project is to be funded, the following are recommendations based on O.E.A. findings:

- Compensate teachers who participate in the workshop sessions with money or release time in order to attract more teachers who could benefit from the training.

- Schedule training sessions at times that make training accessible to all staff.
- Provide time after workshops for follow-up discussion and the opportunity for special education and general education teachers to talk to each other about mainstreaming.
- Expand the on-site trainers' training from four hours to six hours to allow time for discussion.
- Make concerted efforts to enlist the school principal's active support and participation, by impressing upon them the benefits to be gained from conducting the program in their schools.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report evaluates the second and third years of the Less Restrictive Placement: Building Networks Personnel Training Project (L.R.P.) 1984-85 and 1985-86. The goal of the three-year project was to improve communication between general and special education staff at all levels for the purpose of promoting less restrictive placement and mainstreaming special education students into the general education classes.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In 1983-84, the Division of Special Education (D.S.E.) central staff, regional staff development personnel, L.R.P. training coordinators, and consultants from Fordham University's School of Education worked together to design a series of six workshop training sessions. The goal of these workshops was to improve attitudes toward, and facilitate understanding of the theory of less restrictive placement among general and special education teachers and support staff. Each of the six training sessions was structured as to format, agenda, and time allotted for each portion of the workshop. The six workshops could be presented in order or out of sequence. The content of the six workshops is described below.

Session 1: Exploring Teacher Expectations

In the first session, on-site trainers introduced L.R.P.'s primary objectives: to develop communication networks among school staff, and to enhance appropriate student movement to less restrictive placements.

The purpose of this session was to heighten awareness among teachers of the differences in perceptions between the special education teacher sending the student to the mainstream class, and the general education teacher receiving the child. Teachers discussed their expectations for the L.R.P. student in their classrooms, and compared their tolerance for various classroom behaviors. Participants also discussed their experiences with the mainstreaming process, and tried to identify the factors that facilitated or impeded it.

Session 2: Making It Perfectly Clear

The decision to mainstream a special education student or move him/her to a less restrictive placement is based on an improved learning rate, development of appropriate social skills, and reductions in management needs. In Session 2, trainers expanded upon the discussion initiated in Session 1 by specifying the requirements of the less restrictive setting, and discussing strategies to help the special education student make the necessary adjustment.

Session 3: Exploring Learning Styles

This session examined differences in the way students process information. To sensitize teachers to differences in learning styles among individual students, participants analyzed their own learning styles and how their way of processing information influenced their teaching.

Session 4: Social Integration

The goals of this session were to acquaint teachers with strategies that facilitate a student's social integration in the mainstream or less restrictive classroom. Through a simulation activity, participants explored ways of lending support and providing structure to the student in small-group interactions.

Session 5: Dealing with Feelings

This session addressed students' social and emotional transition to the mainstream or less restrictive placement. Teachers examined the concerns, actions, and behaviors of everyone involved in the transition process -- the feelings of students and teachers in both sending and receiving classrooms -- and discussed strategies to deal with problem situations.

Session 6: Maintaining the Student in the Less Restrictive Placement

This session served as a summary. Participants evaluated their school's mainstreaming procedures and discussed their own experiences with less restrictive placement. Using simulation, teachers reviewed strategies to improve the transition of children to the mainstream.

STAFF

Community school district (C.S.D.) superintendents and regional deputy assistant superintendents (D.A.S.s) targeted schools in their regions to participate in the L.R.P. Project. Principals at the targeted schools, in cooperation with the

special education supervisor, selected two teachers, one from their general education staff and one from special education, to become part-time on-site trainers working as a team to conduct the training workshops in their schools for other school staff.

Two L.R.P. coordinators were responsible for the day-to-day operation of the project. Their primary role in most of the second year, and all of the third year was training the on-site trainers. The coordinators' other responsibilities included: working with regional staff to develop the content, method, and format of the training workshops; selecting and distributing materials; arranging and scheduling workshops; working with the Office of Educational Assessment to design the evaluation instrument and procedures for data collection; collecting data; and maintaining records for all phases of the program.

The on-site trainers were responsible for delivering the training workshops in their schools. They attended two two-hour orientation sessions in which the training coordinators presented the curriculum for the six workshops along with instruction on how to teach the material. The on-site trainers in each school then met with the L.R.P. training coordinators, their principal, supervisor, and school-based support team to set up the workshops.

POPULATION SERVED

Personnel participating in the L.R.P. workshops were special and general education teachers in all special education regions at 50 sites in the second year, and 81 sites in the third year.

Fewer than half (750) of the teachers eligible for the L.R.P. training at the target sites participated in 1984-85. In 1985-86, attendance more than doubled; about two-thirds (1,600) of eligible teachers attended the workshop training.

REPORT FORMAT

This report is organized as follows: Chapter II describes the methodology; Chapter III presents the findings on program implementation and outcomes; Chapter IV draws conclusions and proposes recommendations if this project or a similar project is to be refunded.

II. METHODOLOGY

To assess the quality and extent of program implementation, and the participants' response to training for the years 1984-85 and 1985-86, O.E.A. consultants interviewed school principals and the on-site trainers, and observed training workshops conducted by the on-site training teams. O.E.A. designed pre- and posttest questionnaires which were administered to teacher participants at the beginning and end of the training series to assess their knowledge and attitudes about mainstreaming and less restrictive placement. This report presents combined outcomes for the second and third year of the program.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Participants will increase their knowledge of mainstreaming and less restrictive placement after completing the six training sessions.
- Participants will improve their attitude toward mainstreaming and less restrictive placement after completing the six training sessions.

SAMPLE

In the second year of the program, O.E.A. randomly selected 21 out of 50 training sites for observations and interviews. In the third year, O.E.A. randomly selected 38 out of 81 sites participating that year.

All general education and special education teachers participating in the training at all sites were expected to complete two sets of pre- and posttest questionnaires; one set concerning knowledge and the other concerning attitude. In 1984-85 approxi-

mately 500 participants in both the knowledge and attitude categories completed questionnaires which represented two-thirds of the participants. In 1985-86, about 350 participants completed questionnaires, fewer than 25 percent of the participants in that year. This small response rate made it difficult to generalize about the entire population.

O.E.A. interviewed on-site trainers about their own training, their perceptions concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and their assessment of the teacher participants' responses to the training workshops. O.E.A. also interviewed the principals about their participation and attitudes toward the L.R.P. project in their schools.

INSTRUMENTS

To assess the degree of knowledge gained by teacher participants, O.E.A. designed a 15-item multiple-choice questionnaire. For 14 of the items, there was only one correct response and four distractors. For one item, there were two accurate choices, both of which were required for a correct response. To assess the attitudes of teacher participants, O.E.A. administered an eight-item Mainstreaming Attitude Inventory using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

O.E.A. developed two parallel forms for both the knowledge and attitude questionnaires as pre- and posttests. Before the training began, participants were given either form as a pretest. When the training was completed, participants were given the alternate form as a posttest.

DATA COLLECTION

The on-site trainers collected pretest questionnaires at or before the initial training session, and distributed posttest questionnaires at the end of the final training session. Teachers returned questionnaires to the on-site trainers within three days. Dates of collection varied for both pre- and posttesting, according to the dates the project started and ended at a particular site.

DATA ANALYSIS

O.E.A. analyzed the knowledge and attitude data by a series of correlated *t*-tests for comparisons between means. The analysis investigated the differences between pretest and posttest results on the attitude and knowledge questionnaire.

III. FINDINGS

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Training the On-Site Trainers

In interviews with O.E.A. consultants, a majority of the on-site trainers in both the second and third years of Project L.R.P. reported that they volunteered for the job or took the assignment at the suggestion of their principal or supervisor. On-site trainers in the third year had more teaching experience in general, and more experience teaching in special education than those in the second year.

Commenting on the quality of the training they received from the L.R.P. coordinators, more than twice as many on-site trainers rated it excellent in the third year (18 percent) than in the second year (seven percent). At the same time, close to twice as many on-site trainers (26 percent) in the third year requested additional training than those in the second year. On-site trainers in the third year echoed those in the second year in expressing frustration with the lack of time allotted in their training sessions for questions and discussion. They proposed that their training be expanded by one hour per session to a total of six more hours.

Almost unanimously, on-site trainers in both years rated the performance of the L.R.P. training coordinators favorably. They described the coordinators as dedicated, accessible, and supportive, and commented that they provided excellent role models as trainers.

On-Site Training Workshops

Teachers attended the on-site workshops in their schools on a voluntary basis. They did not receive remuneration for their time, nor compensation in the way of release time as is sometimes the practice in staff training programs. Most workshops were 40-45 minutes long, but on-site trainers felt strongly that workshop sessions needed to be longer to allow time for questions and discussion.

The scheduling of training workshops in both years frequently proved difficult. In the second year of the project, trainers at all but two schools conducted workshops during lunch period. This often required trainers to teach the same workshop two periods in a row to accommodate the staff's staggered lunch hours. Many teachers did not participate in the training because they were reluctant to give up their lunch periods. Others discontinued their participation, commenting that it might be more professional to provide per session remuneration for participants.

As a result, in the third year of L.R.P., trainers scheduled workshops before and after regular school hours as well as during lunchtime. The additional meeting times seemed to alleviate the scheduling problems somewhat because workshop attendance was much higher in the third year. In 1985-86, 48 percent of the sites had more than 21 participants per training session, while in the second year only 18 percent had that many participants.

In the second year, O.E.A. field consultants observed that providing refreshments during training sessions helped increase attendance, as well as fostering a relaxed atmosphere in the workshops. Thus, Project L.R.P. served refreshments on a regular basis in the third year.

At all sites observed by O.E.A. in both 1984-85 and 1985-86, Session I was conducted as the first of the six training sessions, while the other modules were conducted in varying sequence. The number of training sessions conducted at each site varied, depending on when the L.R.P. program was initiated. In the second year, staff at only three percent of the sites received training in all six of the training modules. In the third year, a concerted effort was made to initiate the program earlier in the academic year, and to begin training on-site trainers sooner. This was indeed accomplished: O.E.A. site visits and interviews conducted between February and April, 1986, at the same point in the program cycle as the previous year, indicated that 41 percent of the schools in the third year had received all six workshops.

In 1985-86, O.E.A. asked on-site trainers to indicate the sessions they considered to be the most stimulating and helpful to participants. Of the 34 on-site trainers interviewed, 13 trainers (38 percent) chose the session on learning styles (Session 3) as the most beneficial for teachers; eight (24 percent) selected the session on expectations (Session 2); and seven (21 percent) the introductory session.

Responses to Training Workshops

In interviews with O.E.A. consultants, on-site trainers reported that the participants' responses to the training workshops improved considerably from the second to the third year of the project. In the second year, 77 percent of the on-site trainers reported that the teachers who participated in the training were quite positive about the workshops. In the third year, almost all of the on-site trainers reported that participants' responses were favorable. Trainers reported that participants described the workshops as "excellent," "very personalized," "marvelous," simply great," and "active."

On-site trainers stated unanimously that communication between general education and special education staffs in their schools was ultimately strengthened as a result of some of the staff's participation in the training. Trainers reported that teachers began talking more to each other about issues related to mainstreaming and less restrictive placement. In particular, teachers discussed the differences in their expectations for L.R.P. students, as well as the day-to-day instruction and management of L.R.P. students in the classroom. In schools where principals were committed to mainstreaming, on-site trainers noted that the information, direction, and support provided by Project L.R.P. was invaluable.

An issue raised consistently in both years by on-site trainers was the need for follow-up. They expressed great interest in a continuation of the L.R.P. program that would allow

for a constant flow of information between special and general education teachers. Their suggestions were: make L.R.P. training mandatory for all teachers in the school, develop another series of workshops focusing on students who had made the transition into the mainstream, and schedule combined general and special education staff meetings for the express purpose of exchanging information and ideas about mainstreaming and less restrictive placement.

A high level of administrative staff involvement in L.R.P. directly contributed to the program's success. In many instances, principals became very involved and dedicated to the L.R.P. training. Of twelve principals responding in the third year of the project, 10 indicated that they perceived L.R.P. to have had a very positive effect on their staff in that it improved communication between special and general education teachers. (The remaining two principals were guarded in their response rather than negative.)

TRAINING OUTCOMES

In collecting and compiling the data from the teachers' questionnaires, O.E.A. based its findings on 131 teachers in 1984-85 and 63 teachers in 1985-86 for whom pre- and posttest data in the knowledge category were available; 140 teachers in 1984-85 and 64 teachers in 1985-86 for whom pre- and posttest data in the attitude category were available.

Knowledge Assessment

According to Table 1, teachers in 1985-86 demonstrated a significant increase in knowledge on the posttest. While the trend was toward improvement in knowledge in 1984-85, the differences were not statistically significant. The participants' knowledge was lower to begin with in 1985-86, suggesting that teachers participating that year had been more uninformed about less restrictive placement and mainstreaming than participants in 1984-85.

Attitude Assessment

The outcomes for the attitude inventory for 1984-85 and 1985-86 are presented in Table 2. Participants' attitudes went up slightly in 1984-85 from pre- to posttest and down slightly in 1985-86, indicating no significant change in participants' attitudes after the training. In 1984-85, the attitudes improved slightly; the reverse was true in 1985-86. There was no pattern to these outcomes. Additional results suggested that in 1985-86, with attrition, the participants who replaced those who dropped out had more positive attitudes than the original participants. Comparing the attitude outcomes for the two years, O.E.A. found that the outcomes for the 1985-86 participants had been lower at the start of the training program, as they had been in the knowledge assessment.

TABLE 1

Teachers' Knowledge Scores on
Pre- and Posttests in 1984-85 and 1985-86[a]

Time of Administration	Mean Score	S.D.	N
1984-85			
Pretest[b]	10.52	2.46	131
Posttest	11.18	2.64	131
1985-86			
Pretest[b]	8.48	1.98	63
Posttest	8.98*	2.35	63

*p <.05.

Source: L.R.P. Teacher Questionnaire

[a]Based on a 15-item multiple-choice survey.

[b]Responses consist of teachers for whom pre- and posttest results were available.

TABLE 2

Teachers' Attitudes on Pre- and Posttest Attitude Scales in 1984-85 and 1985-86[a]

Time of Administration	Mean Score	S.D.	N
1984-85			
Pretest[b]	27.30	6.12	140
Posttest	27.81	5.21	140
1985-86			
Pretest[b]	26.53	4.99	64
Posttest	24.28	5.70	64

Source: L.R.P. Mainstreaming Attitude Inventory

[a]The scales consist of eight items, scored from one to five. The most positive attitudes would receive a score of 40; the least, a score of eight.

[b]Responses consist of teachers for whom pre- and posttest results were available.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the second and third years of Project L.R.P., on-site trainers and principals reported that communication between the general education and special education staffs in their schools increased as result of the training, especially when school principals actively supported the program.

According to the on-site trainers, the participants' responses to the workshops were even more favorable in the third year than the second year. Almost unanimously trainers in the third year reported that participants rated the workshops excellent. Participation more than doubled in 1985-86, suggesting that the training drew more teachers from across the board in the third year.

The most helpful of the six training sessions, trainers felt, were those that invited the teacher participants to exchange information with each other about their experiences and expectations for less restrictive placement. Less popular were the training sessions that dealt with the practical aspects of managing the mainstreamed student in the classroom.

On-site Trainers' Responses

The on-site trainers in both years felt that their training coordinators were dedicated and supportive, providing inspiring role models for them as trainers. The trainers found the information and support they received from the L.R.P. coordinators to be invaluable in teaching and managing mainstreamed students in

their own classrooms. They reported that the experience of working in a team of special education and general education teachers was a graphic demonstration of the value of communication between the two staffs.

On-site trainers in both years said they could have benefitted from an additional two hours in their own training sessions for questions and discussion. They felt that the workshop sessions in the schools should be scheduled more conveniently for teachers and also be extended for discussion and the sharing of ideas between special education and general education teachers. They requested that training participants be compensated for their time in order to attract more teachers to the program.

Knowledge and Attitude

There was no notable change in participants' knowledge and attitude toward mainstreaming and less restrictive placement after the Project L.R.P. training. The lower pretest and posttest outcomes in 1985-86 in both categories suggested that an effort was made in the third year to recruit teachers who were less knowledgeable about less restrictive placement and could benefit most from the training.

The three year Project L.R.P. ended with academic year 1985-86. If a similar project is to be funded, the following are recommendations:

- Compensate teachers who participate in the workshop sessions with money or release time in order to attract more teachers who could benefit from the training;

- Schedule more training sessions before school or during the school day to make training accessible to all staff;
- Provide time after workshops for follow-up discussion and the opportunity for special and general education teachers to talk to each other about mainstreaming;
- Expand the on-site trainers' training from four hours to six hours to allow time for discussion;
- Make concerted efforts to engage the school principals' active support and participation by impressing upon them the benefits to be gained.

New York City
Board of Education

110 Livingston Street
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Nathan Quinones
Chancellor

Office of Educational Assessment
Richard Guttenberg
Director
(718) 935-3767

A SUMMARY OF THE LESS RESTRICTIVE PLACEMENT PERSONNEL TRAINING 1984-1986*

Less Restrictive Placement Personnel Training (L.R.P.) was a three-year program designed by Division of Special Education (D.S.E.) staff to develop materials and training modules for general and special education staff and support personnel in order to increase the number of special education students mainstreamed into general education classes. The three-year program completed its final year of operation in June 1986. This report covers the years 1984-85 and 1985-86.

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On-site trainers in both years reported that participants reacted favorably to the training. In addition to increasing their knowledge and understanding about less restrictive placement, on-site trainers reported that communication between the general and special education staffs had improved. The ongoing involvement and commitment of principals, and their support of mainstreaming enhanced the participants' response to the program, on-site trainers reported. On-site trainers stated they needed more time in their own training and the workshop sessions for questions and discussion.

*This summary is based on "A Final Evaluation of the 1984-86 Less Restrictive Placement Personnel Training (L.R.P.)," prepared by the O.E.A. Special Education Evaluation Unit.

There was no notable change in participants' knowledge and attitude toward less restrictive placement after the training. In 1985-86, the lower pre-test and posttest outcomes suggested that an effort was made in the last year of the program, to recruit teachers who were less knowledgeable about less restrictive placement and could benefit the most from the training.

Project L.R.P. ended in 1985-86. If a similar project is to be funded, the following are recommendations based on O.E.A. findings:

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